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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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~ Windows 7 Leak Helping ~ The 2009 State of Spam ~ Big MS Layoffs?

-* Facebook Policy Draws Anger! *-
-* "Secure" Sites May Not Be Safe Sites *-
-* Web Sites Could Get Cinema-Style Ratings! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

Welcome to a new year! I can't say that I miss 2008 too much due to our personal losses a couple of weeks ago, but like it or not, time presses onward. We have our beloved Butkus "home" with us again even though it's in the form of his cremated remains. He meant too much to us to treat him like a piece of unwanted "trash" via mass-burial or cremation. So now his urn is adorned with one of many favorite photos along with one of his most treasured toys. We're still grieving, but I guess that you really have to be a true dog-lover to understand. So I appreciate your indulging me when I talk about our loss within these pages.

Otherwise, it's been an interesting year. Here at A-ONE, we've completed 10 years of publication. In and of itself, that is quite an accomplishment, if I do say so myself. My thanks go out to all of you who have helped us to continue to make this possible. Your interest, whether it was sending us interesting articles, or just by continuing to read our offering week after week means a lot to us. News pertaining to Atari computing and gaming continues to dwindle, but the faithful are still out there in one form or another. While we all certainly wish that the name Atari was prominent in today's world, it is not. And it hasn't been for many years now. That's just the way that things are. But as long as people like you continue to talk about them, support web sites pertaining to Atari-related topics, continue to program for them, or just plain enjoy using them as much as you do - we'll continue to do our meager part in reporting about it. Of course, we'll continue to bring you other news that may be more relevant to your current computing and gaming interests.

I hope that you all had an enjoyable New Year's Eve. In this part of the world, our New Year's Eve brought about a half a foot of new snow that had to be cleaned up. Typically, I'd spend New Year's Eve with a few drinks and listening to some raucous music from years gone by. I really wasn't in the mood to do that this year, so I just spent some time relaxing, played a few games on our new Nintendo DS, and saw the new year rung in with little fanfare. Maybe I'm getting older, but this new year didn't seem to hold much celebratory interest as in the past. But, it's still a new year, and I hope that it will bring some new beginnings, and some resolutions to some of the problems that we're all facing today. Happy New Year, from all of us at A-ONE!

Until next time...

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TeraDesk 4.00 Released

Version 4.00 of TeraDesk open-source desktop for the 16-bit and 32-bit lines of Atari computers is available at:

<http://solair.eunet.rs/~vdjole/teradesk.htm>

Please note the new location; domain name has been changed because of recent political changes :(The old URL should still be available for a while as:

<http://solair.eunet.yu/~vdjole/teradesk.htm>

The main new feature in this release of TeraDesk is the ability to handle large disk partition sizes- up to 2 TB, which seems to have become a necessity with appearance of large hard disks or systems like AranyM. Other improvements include better formatting of displayed large numerical values, automatic truncation of long filenames when copying to FAT partitions, support for links to relative paths, etc. Besides, a number of (not very critical) bugs has been fixed.

Have fun, and a Happy New Year.

Djordje

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, there MAY be enough Stuff in the NewsGroup for us to have a decent column this week... of course, it took TWO weeks to accumulate enough traffic for a week's column, but let's not dwell on that, huh?

But before we get to the Atari stuff, let's talk a little bit about this 'n that. Last week, I talked a lot about my pet choices. The whole line of thought was brought about by Dana mentioning the surgery and hopeful recovery of his faithful dog, Butkus. That got me thinking about my pets, past and present. Of course, I didn't know that Butkus had taken a turn for the worse and left us... Our thoughts go out to Unka Dana and Auntie Mrs. Dana [grin]. I don't remember the exact wording anymore, but the line from The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's "Mr. Bojangles" always struck me: "It ain't fair that a dog don't get to live too long, but still has to die old." Yep, ya got that one right, Bojangles.

So, here we are at the beginning of a new year, looking back at what I'm sure everyone would consider a... less than optimum year. I'm not going to enumerate all the things that are off-kilter, because unless you're

stupid or unwilling to see, you already know. If you're unwilling to see all the things that need to be fixed, then nothing anyone else says is going to make a difference. If you're stupid, well, you're probably having someone else read this to you, and they've cut this part right the hell out so you don't feel bad.

This is going to be a watershed year, I think. Either we'll finally start doing something about all the problems we've collectively caused, or the whole damned thing is going to come crashing down upon us. I'm talking about not only political, but social, economic and environmental problems that threaten to bring us to our knees, not in small part because we can't even agree on whether or not they actually ARE problems.

I had a rather interesting conversations with a very conservative woman the other day. She was a true world-traveler.. born and raised in Canada, lived for decades in Germany, then a time in Great Britain... the only thing she was sure of was that we didn't need social programs. Her view of Canada, Germany and England was that they spent too much on 'socialization', and that they were now paying the price.

Of course, being the pain in the butt that I am, I observed that she had picked some very "socialist" environments in which to live, and that it appeared to me that she'd 'milked' the system for as long as she needed it, and then came here to extol the virtues of being lactose-free. Typical behavior for some folks, I'm afraid: Use the system to better your own situation, then 'slam the door' and keep everyone else from doing the same.

Another interesting thing she said was that "the wars aren't important" and that "you can blame the world economy on the countries that wouldn't help us."

WHAT?? First of all, how exactly did she become 'us'? Is this what we're going to have to deal with this year? Gaza, Global warming, bail-outs, closings, unemployment, interest rates, foreclosures, Darfur, Kabul, Tehran and Baghdad and we're wasting our time finger-pointing? And not just finger-pointing, but finger-pointing in such a stupid, self-serving way.

I've got an idea: Why don't we stop whining and crying about OUR pet disaster being the worst and just shut up and work toward getting it straightened out? Even if each problem gets only a little better, trust me... better is better.

Personally, I think this is finally going to be the year where we roll our sleeves up and, if not take responsibility, at least take our problems seriously.

I've got my fingers crossed. How 'bout you?

Well, enough of this. Let's get to the news, hints, tips and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Ben Smith asks for help finding XFormer software:

"I need a Link for Atari 8 Bit Software to be used on ST XFormer!
Please!"

'Russ G' tells Ben:

"The archive places I knew seem gone. There was the Holmes' archive at
langsite. There are some game sites, Atarimania.com and a Vietnamese
site."

Ben tells Russ:

"I've added at the bottom a post from Michael Current. He's A great
treasure and Atari Resource! Someone E-Mailed me the game I was looking
for! I was able to transfer it to a 5.25" Disk so I can play it on my
800xl! I would like to be able to transfer any file this way using the
XFormer cable that I have! Unfortunately, the Transfer Utility wont
transfer just any file. I need to transfer any file from my ST to 8 Bit
using the Transfer Utility!...

Archive-name: atari-8-bit/welcome
Posting-Frequency: 10 days
Last-modified: July 20, 2008

Welcome to the comp.sys.atari.8bit newsgroup!

Discussion about 8 bit Atari micros.

Welcome to the Usenet newsgroup for discussion about the Atari 8-bit
family of computers! These include the Atari 400, 800, 1200XL, 600XL,
800XL, 65XE, 130XE, and 800XE personal/home computers, and the Atari XE
video game system.

The 400/800/1200XL/600XL/800XL computers were produced from 1979-1984 by
Atari, Inc., of Sunnyvale, California, USA, while Atari was a division
of Warner Communications.

The 800XL/65XE/130XE/800XE computers and XE game system were produced
from 1984-1992 by Atari Corp., also based in Sunnyvale, California, USA.

Today, the Atari computer intellectual property rights, along with the
home market rights to the Atari trademark itself, are owned by
Atari Interactive, Inc., a subsidiary of Infogrames Entertainment SA.
<http://corporate.infogrames.com/>

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

Kept by Michael Current, michael@mcurrent.name

The latest version of this document is posted to these Usenet newsgroups
every 10 days: comp.sys.atari.8bit, comp.answers, news.answers

Known mirrors of the the latest version of this document:

<ftp://rtfm.mit.edu/pub/faqs/atari-8-bit/welcome>
<http://faqs.cs.uu.nl/na-dir/atari-8-bit/welcome.html>
<http://www.faqs.org/faqs/atari-8-bit/welcome/>

NEWSGROUP BACKGROUND

comp.sys.atari.8bit was created in November 1986 (as part of the Great

Renaming) as a direct replacement for: net.micro.atari8

comp.sys.atari.8bit is unmoderated, and has no formal newsgroup charter.

The comp.* hierarchy of Usenet newsgroups is managed by the Big-8 Management Board: <http://www.big-8.org/>

RELATED USENET NEWSGROUPS

alt.binaries.comp.atari8bit

Programs for Atari's 6502-based orphans.

comp.sys.atari.advocacy

Attacking and defending Atari computers.

comp.sys.atari.announce

Atari related hard/software announcements. (Moderated)

Moderator: Kevin Savetz

comp.sys.atari.announce web page: <http://www.atariarchives.org/csaa/>

comp.sys.atari.programmer

Programming on the Atari computer.

WEB FORUMS

Atari 8-Bit family (forum sponsored by Atari, Inc.)

<http://www.ataricomunity.com/forums/forumdisplay.php?f=524>

Atari 8-Bit Computers forum at AtariAge

<http://www.atariage.com/forums/index.php?showforum=12>

WEB PAGES

Atari 8-bit Computer Web Ring, kept by Raphael Espino

Ring Hub: <http://www.webring.com/hub?ring=a8bit>

Ring Home Page: <http://www.geocities.com/rjespino/a8ring.html>

SOFTWARE

<http://www.atarimania.com/> "The World's Finest Atari Database"

<http://atari.fandal.cz/> Games, Demos

<http://ftp.pigwa.net/> or <ftp://ftp.pigwa.net/> "Total Demoscene Archive"

XL Search "The Atari 8-Bit File Archive Search Engine" (Bill Kendrick)

<http://xlsearch.atari.org/> or

<http://www.newbreedsoftware.com/xlsearch/>

Atari SAP Music Archive, <http://asma.atari.org/>

INFORMATION

Atari 8-Bit Computers: Frequently Asked Questions (Michael Current)

<ftp://rtfm.mit.edu/pub/faqs/atari-8-bit/faq>

<http://faqs.cs.uu.nl/na-dir/atari-8-bit/faq.html>

<http://www.faqs.org/faqs/atari-8-bit/faq/>

<http://www.faqs.org/faqs/atari-8-bit/faq/preamble.html> (multipart edition)

Atari 8-Bit Computers: Vendors and Developers (Michael Current)

<ftp://rtfm.mit.edu/pub/faqs/atari-8-bit/vendev>

<http://faqs.cs.uu.nl/na-dir/atari-8-bit/vendev.html>

<http://www.faqs.org/faqs/atari-8-bit/vendev/>

<http://www.faqs.org/faqs/atari-8-bit/vendev/preamble.html> (multipart ed.)

Atari 8-bit New User, Emulator Help FAQ (Bill Kendrick)
http://www.sonic.net/~nbs/new_and_emu.html

Atari Disk Image FAQ (Steve Tucker)
<http://www.atarimax.com/apc/docs/DiskImageFAQ/>

Cartridge List for the Classic Atari 800/XL/XE Computers (Andrew Krieg)
<http://my.execpc.com/~krieg/links/8bit.carts>

Atari BBS List (Trevor Holyoak)
<http://www.atariplanet.info/ATARIBBS.TXT>

Easter Egg Compendium and Contest (Digital Press)
<http://www.digitpress.com/eastereggs/> --Atari 400-800-XL-XE-XEGS computers

USER GROUPS

ABACUS - Atari Bay Area Computer User Society
<http://www.abacusonline.org/>

ABBUC - Atari Bit Byter User Club
<http://www.abbuc.de/>

ABBUC HAR - Hanover ABBUC Regional Group
<http://www.bertelmann.org/har/>

ABBUC RAF - Frankfurt ABBUC Regional Group
<http://www.abbuc-raf.de/>

ACEC - Atari Computer Enthusiasts of Columbus
<http://acec.atari.org/>

IMAGE - Indiana-Michigan Atari Group Exchange
20087 Roosevelt Rd, South Bend IN 46614-5026, USA

SCAT - Suburban Chicago ATarians
<http://www.scatarians.org/>

SLCC - San Leandro Computer Club
http://william_george.tripod.com/slcc/

SPACE - Saint Paul Atari Computer Enthusiasts
<http://space.atari.org/>

NEWS SOURCES (in addition to comp.sys.atari.announce)

Atari Online News, Etc. -- A-ONE Online Magazine (Dana P. Jacobson)
<http://www.atarinews.org/>

ATARItoday (Andreas Bertelmann)
<http://www.ataritoday.net/>

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Whew! What a post, huh? I don't know about you, but I'm cutting that out and saving it.

Russ G tells Ben:

"Yes, I neglected to mention the FAQ. Michael Current keeps up with URLs and sources for A8, an excellent source. I have my own archive, but it isn't accessible except to say something needed and let me search. I don't have the POOL disks, but I do have a lot of stuff, CTH archive, Holmes archive, a German archive, and my own collections from the days. ftp.pigwa.net seems extensive, maybe too extensive, as I can't find stuff on it."

'Super Stonic' adds:

"There are some Atari 8-bit archive sites listed on DP's links page:
<http://www.digitpress.com/links.htm>"

Ben Smith now asks for help setting up STiK:

"I'm trying to install STIK but when I'm booting up I get an error Dialog box saying "STiK is not loaded". I can't get past this dialog box by clicking on it or clicking the <Return> key so I have to reboot! Is there a file STiK is looking for? What's the filename and where should I place it so STiK finds it?"

Jean-Luc Ceccoli tells Ben:

"If I remember correctly, there must be a folder named STIK_CFG at the root of your boot partition, which should contain the config file, something like DEFAULT.CFG."

Well folks, that's it for this week. I know, it hasn't been a great year for Atari info, but let's hope that things start picking up now that the holidays are over, huh?

Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Nielsen's Top 10 PC Games and Consoles of 2008!

"""""""""" Acer Launches Extreme Gaming Aspire Notebook!

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Nielsen's Top 10 PC Games and Consoles of 2008

World of Warcraft, Tetris, and the PlayStation 2 make strange bedfellows, but they each topped Nielsen's 2008 year-end scan of popular media trends in the U.S. World of Warcraft's a no-brainer on the PC games chart. But what about Alexey Pajitnov's twenty-some-year-old Tetris for mobiles? And are people *really* still playing the PS2?

And then some, according to Nielsen. In fact the PS2's "usage minutes" - 31.7% of total - were actually /double/ the number two console on the list. Surely the Wii, right? Think again: The Xbox 360 topped the Wii, 17.2% to 13.4%.

The PS2's lead (down from 42.2% in 2007) should surprise no one when you factor the console's mammoth install base and the increasingly vibrant secondary market for used games.

Curiouser: The old black-and-electric-green Xbox, which held 13.9% of Nielsen's console usage numbers in 2007, beat the PlayStation 3 in 2008, 9.7% to 7.3%. There's a splash of cold water to the face.

Tetris led third quarter mobile revenue shares with 7%, followed by Bejeweled (4%) and Guitar Hero III (3.6%). Nielsen didn't track mobile games in its annual 2007 report.

Bungie's original Halo beat The Sims and The Sims 2 for "average minutes played per week" in PC gaming, though Halo 2 dropped off the chart after tying its predecessor for 4th in 2007. I would've guessed Team Fortress 2 (first appearance this year), Counter-Strike, and Counter-Strike: Source (the latter were numbers 6 and 10 respectively in 2007) for top 10 contenders, but check out Blizzard's Diablo II blazing to life at number 7 after a 2007 absence. Blame Blizzard's Diablo III announcement in June?

The take away: Everyone thinks no one's playing the Wii. They're wrong. The 360 can claim the slightly higher usage-to-units ratio, but the Wii leapt from 5.5% in 2007 to 13.4% in 2008, a notably larger increase than the 360's 11.8% to 17.2%.

The PS3? It's usage increase (2.5% in 2007 to 7.3% in 2008) was actually commensurate with the 360's. Still, Sony's got a year to really get the lead out if it doesn't want to be this generation's GameCube (which, speaking of, was actually number six on Nielsen's console usage chart with 4.6% of total, so that's not necessarily a slam). The PS3's doing much better than the gloomy picture CNN and the Wall Street Journal misleadingly paint, but it's still well off analyst's original predictions.

Total time spent top 10 PC gaming in 2007 = 86 hours per week.

Total time spent top 10 PC gaming in 2008 = 62 hours per week.

Is that a downtrend in overall PC gaming? A down/turn/, to be sure, but

as for trends, it's hard to say with just these numbers. 2008 was kind of a mediocre year for PC games - all the biggest releases were either MMOs or multi-platform ports. With PC exclusives like Diablo III and Starcraft II on the horizon, 2009 looks tastier.

Also: While World of Warcraft topped the PC charts, its average minutes played per week dropped from 1023 in 2007 to 671 in 2008, or from about 17 hours per week to only 11. Sound significant? We'll see. We definitely need more data to gauge whether the juggernaut's peaking, subscriber base increases or no. (Note that Nielsen's numbers predate the Wrath of the Lich King expansion in November, which might've skewed everything more favorably.)

Acer Launches Extreme Gaming Aspire Notebook

In a move to attract more gamers and multimedia enthusiasts, Acer America on Monday introduced the Aspire 8930G-7665 notebook PC. The notebook taps into the power of the new Intel Core 2 Quad mobile processor Q9000, designed for extreme mobile performance and speed for gaming on the go.

"By incorporating the latest capabilities of Intel's Core 2 Quad mobile processors into the Aspire 8930G-7665, Acer is delivering a perfect combination of mobility, innovation and extreme gaming capabilities," said Sumit Agnihotry, vice president of product marketing for Acer America.

Acer promises groundbreaking performance for multimedia applications and 3-D gaming with its latest notebook. It relies on four processing cores, 12MB of shared L2 cache, a 1066-MHz Front Side Bus, and clock speeds of up to 2.53 GHz. According to Acer, the 8930G-7665 brings unprecedented swiftness and realism to 3-D games.

"Gamers and enthusiasts who enjoy HD multimedia entertainment will find the performance benefits of quad-core mobile performance in the Aspire 8930G unrivaled to other multimedia notebooks on the market," Agnihotry said.

Along with new quad-core power, the Aspire 8930G-7665 offers gamers and multimedia enthusiasts high-definition functionality. The notebook PC features an 18.4-inch HD CineCrystal widescreen 1920x1080-pixel display, with a 16:9 aspect ratio.

High-definition entertainment is provided by Blu-ray Disc technology, Nvidia GeForce 9700M GT graphics, and Dolby audio. Acer said the new notebook gives users a true cinematic experience for movie watching, playing games, and listening to music.

The Acer Aspire 8930G-7665 is available now for \$1,799. That's an extremely aggressive price for what the notebook offers, according to Roger Kay, principal analyst at Endpoint Technologies Associates. That pricing strategy has allowed Acer to rapidly gain market share in the PC industry, but the audience for this new model is somewhat limited.

"With a large gaming notebook that's priced above \$1,000, you are really not talking about a big volume segment here," Kay said. "There are going to be some people who want this, but it's a small population."

Kay sees the audience for the Acer Aspire 8930G-7665 as gamers who thrive on LAN parties, a group of individuals with two or more gaming consoles, TVs and games sharing a common router for multiplayer competitions.

According to Kay, one of Acer's positioning strategies is to have a PC for everyone. The company, he said, is blanketing the market so it has at least one PC - and sometimes more than one - in the sweet spot for every buying segment.

The Acer Aspire 8930G-7665 gives the company a gaming notebook that bodes well for its other models. "With this model, Acer is showing it can do a super-high-end notebook," Kay said, "so that has some halo effect on the rest of the line."

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Researchers Show 'Secure' Sites May Not Be Safe

The small image of a padlock in the corner of your browser may not accurately indicate that a Web-site connection is secure, according to new research. A team of U.S. and European researchers used a computing grid of more than 200 Sony PlayStation 3 video-game machines to create fake certificates and fool a browser into thinking it had a secure connection with a trusted site.

Researchers from California, teams from the Centrum Wiskunde & Informatica (CWI) and Eindhoven University of Technology in the Netherlands, and teams from the Ecole Polytechnique Federal de Lausanne (EPFL) in Switzerland presented a paper Tuesday at the 25C3 security congress in Berlin. They showed that they were able to generate two messages with one digital signature, similar to the process of an older digital-certificate system, using an algorithm called MD5.

A user who visits a Web site whose URL begins with https usually sees a locked padlock in a browser corner, indicating that the site employs a digital certificate issued by one of several trusted certificate authorities. The browser verifies the certificate, using one of several algorithms, including, for some sites, MD5.

The MD5 digital-certificate system is still in use by many sites, and could enable third parties to create fake certificates and fool a browser into thinking it was visiting a secure site. A more modern and secure digital-certificate system is used by many sites.

The vulnerability was first identified four years ago by Chinese researchers, who had created a collision attack by generating two different messages with the same digital signature. But the amount of

computing power needed to generate a fake certificate was considered a huge obstacle to anyone attempting to take advantage. By one estimation at the time, a desktop computer would need more than 30 years to generate such a fake certificate.

But the paper presented in Berlin demonstrated that the researchers, using PS3s in a cluster, were able to generate two fake certificates with the same digital signature in only three days.

Security experts had mixed responses. Bruce Schneier, chief security technology officer for British Telecom, told The New York Times that most people don't rely on digital certificates. When was the last time you checked your browser certificates to make sure they're good, he asked.

But other security researchers have suggested that the research could have an enormous impact, affecting virtually every browser as well as e-mail, chat servers, and online collaboration. Although only some sites use the older digital certificates, all browsers will accept them.

Using this weakness, for instance, it would be possible to set up virtually undetectable phishing sites that a browser identifies as trusted and secure.

Arjen Lensa, head of EPFL's Laboratory for Cryptologic Algorithms, said the major browser makers, such as Mozilla and Microsoft, have been informed of the vulnerability.

The immediate goal of the research is to end the use of the MD5 algorithm, which is still being used by some certificate authorities. CWI cryptanalyst Marc Stevens said it's imperative to migrate to more robust alternatives such as SHA-2 and the upcoming SHA-3 standard.

The State of Spam: What to Expect in 2009

Spam, oh spam - can we ever get rid of you? 2008 saw a promising blow to the endless sea of junk mail, but the relief didn't last for long. Now, spam experts say new forms of annoyances are on the way for the new year.

"Some battles have been won in 2008, but the war is far from over," says Martin Thornberg, co-founder of SPAMfighter, a software development and spam research company.

So far, junk mail has managed to infiltrate only about 22 percent of its potential Internet territory, Thornberg says. That means more methods - and, yes, more headaches - are bound to be on the horizon.

They may not have a doppler radar, but the SPAMfighter team has a full forecast - and it doesn't look pretty. Here's what's topping the junk mail outlook for 2009:

- * More social network spam. Spammers started bringing their ways to networks in increasing numbers throughout '08, and that trend is expected to climb quickly in the coming months.

- * More complex networks behind the efforts. The shutdown of a Colorado

hosting company in November had a significant effect because of its configuration: That single company served as the control center for the majority of botnets that were propagating unwanted messages. Researchers think as much as 75 percent of all junk mail was tied to that one place. Spammers will be smarter in 2009, SPAMfighter says, building more resilient and less centralized systems.

- * More combined methods. Spam will be partnered with spyware and phishing tactics to create new kinds of "blended threats," SPAMfighter says.

- * An increase in "spear phishing," or spam campaigns targeted to specific groups and interests. These might include messages tailored to employees of a particular company or organization, or even just to members of certain online networks. The messages are designed to look like official communications.

- * A general rise in creativity. In 2008, SPAMfighter observed things like phishing attempts disguised as warnings against phishing. As even novice Internet users become more savvy, the disguises are likely to expand.

Many of the anti-spam precautions seem obvious - but, obviously, everyone isn't taking them. The good news? The number of people still gullible is small. A recent University of California study (PDF) suggests only one in every 12.5 million spam messages gets a response.

The bad news? That tiny percentage is enough to generate \$7,000 a day, or \$3.5 million a year, for a decent-sized spam network, the study says. What's more, the activity could add as many as 8,500 new bots into the spam network every 24 hours.

While we'd love to track down those imbeciles actually ordering stuff from spam - if you're one of them, please leave a comment below with your contact information - the more realistic action is just to spend a few minutes talking about proper cyberprotection. So, if you're confident in your spam-fighting abilities, relax and enjoy a complimentary pumpkin muffin.* Otherwise, read on and reinforce your knowledge.

- * Thinking about responding to an unsolicited message? Maybe a pleasant request to be removed from the list? Don't. End of story.

- * The same goes for "delivery failure" messages. If you don't remember sending the message being referenced, hit delete and move on.

- * Avoid giving out your primary e-mail address on any forum or blog site that you don't absolutely trust. Set up a secondary "junk" account for public distribution instead.

- * Similarly, don't post your primary e-mail address on your own blog or Web site. Bots will find it and add you to their lists.

- * Never send money, either for a purchase or donation, to any entity you learned about through an unsolicited message.

- * This is old, but it still hasn't hit home for some folks: DON'T CLICK ON LINKS IN UNSOLICITED E-MAILS. If a message from your bank tells you to click to confirm your account, ignore it. Open up your browser and type in the bank's legit URL manually, then see if there's any real issue to be addressed.

Simple enough? I thought so. And, not to leave anyone out, we've arranged to commend your continued reading with a warm cinnamon sticky bun, on the house.** You're a strong soldier in the war against spam, dear friend. Welcome to the team.

Macintosh at 25: Still The Innovation Leader

On January 24, 1984, the Macintosh came into the world, starting the second major revolution in the personal computer industry. Steve Jobs and team took some lessons from Xerox PARC and created the first user-friendly, mass market computer.

By today's standards, it wasn't that user-friendly (some will remember disk-swapping with the original Mac, which had 128KB of RAM and a 400KB 3.5-inch floppy disk drive), but compared with Microsoft's DOS operating system, it was a major technical innovation.

The 128K Mac version of the graphical user interface, with icons, fonts, folders, audio and a mouse, started a new era of computing that hasn't yet run its full course. MacPaint, MacWrite, and eventually LaserWriter, PageMaker, and Photoshop led to a revolution in desktop publishing, and AppleTalk made networking relatively simple.

After nearly 25 years, the Macintosh and its offspring, such as the iPod and iPhone, are still leading in terms of setting the pace for innovation. Mac sales climbed over the past several years, but still represent a small portion of overall PC sales and have slowed down recently. The iPod holds market share in its category and the iPhone has set a new standard for smart phones.

With the annual Macworld conference approaching, and Steve Jobs declining to participate in the proceedings, expectations are low for any major announcements.

Of course, the Mac fan sites and blogs are full of speculation about Steve Jobs' health, a new Mac Mini and iMac, a quad-core Mac laptop, new home servers, a cloud-based version of the iWork suite of applications, an iPod e-book reader, and a Netbook with a 7- to 9-inch screen.

Whatever Apple announces at Macworld, without Jobs spinning his reality distortion field onstage, the result will be less impactful. Nonetheless, don't expect the Mac faithful to walk away from Macworld without something to satisfy their cravings.

Windows 7 Leak Helps Microsoft Focus Beyond Vista

A trial version of Microsoft's upcoming Windows 7 operating system has leaked to the Internet. The blogosphere is buzzing about several sites where tech enthusiasts can download the beta Build 7000 version of the operating system.

Specifically, the operating system can be found on the Pirate Bay BitTorrent site, and it has been downloaded thousands of times. A second

BitTorrent site, Mininova, also has a beta version of Windows 7.

Microsoft wasn't immediately available for comment, but the company had not planned to officially release beta copies of Windows 7 until the MSDN conference in January. A final version of the post-Vista OS is scheduled for release in late 2009 or early 2010.

A software build leaked from a company is no big deal, according to Michael Gartenberg, vice president of mobile strategy for Jupitermedia. Nor is it the first time Windows 7 has leaked from Microsoft's testing pool. Last October, just hours after Microsoft released the alpha edition at its Professional Developers Conference, the software showed up on the Internet.

Microsoft may not be too upset about the leaks. Gartenberg said having so many journalists and bloggers writing about the Windows 7 posting is actually good for Microsoft as it tries to overcome negative Vista publicity.

"Microsoft should be pleased that this build is getting as much attention as it has, because when people stop talking about your products is when you have a problem," Gartenberg said. "What's even more gratifying for Microsoft is it seems most people who are using this leaked software seem to be fairly impressed with its capabilities and performance, which bodes pretty well for Windows 7 going forward."

As Gartenberg sees it, Vista may be the most successful product deemed a failure by observers. Microsoft spent millions on a campaign to realign consumer perceptions about the controversial operating system.

"The Vista brand was something Microsoft needed to get past," Gartenberg said. "While the product itself clearly can be salvaged in the guise of Windows, the Vista brand wasn't doing anything for Microsoft and the sooner they can get past that and get people focused on the Windows brand and the Windows 7 message, the better."

Even if Windows 7 doesn't turn out to offer dramatic updates, getting attention about the next generation of Microsoft's Windows operating system can only help, Gartenberg said. Based on Build 7000, he said it's possible that Windows 7 could make its market debut in time for the 2009 holiday season.

"Expect to hear much more formal news about Windows 7 at the Consumer Electronics Show next week and into next year as Microsoft tries to get the market away from Vista and the Vista message and more onto the overall Windows message," Gartenberg said.

Macworld Rumor Mill Is Humming with Dreams Again

Macworld wouldn't be Macworld if it didn't stir up the rumor mill just days before the much-anticipated event. Apple fans enjoy thinking up fun devices and gadgets that Apple engineers should be developing, and this year is no different.

"As always, the more out the rumor is, the less likely it's going to come to pass," said Michael Gartenberg, vice president of mobile strategy at Jupitermedia.

High on the rumor list is the iPhone nano, a wishfully more affordable version of the iPhone. Already manufacturers have posted photos of silicone cases and other accessories.

Not far behind is a rumor that a new iPhone 3G with more storage capacity is in the works. In fact, the rumor has Apple engineers working on a 32GB iPhone. An old rumor that Apple's inventory of 8GB iPhones would be sold at a low price has come true. AT&T is selling a version for \$99 while Walmart has one for \$150.

Picasa, anyone? Another rumor has Google coming out with a Mac version of Picasa, a photo storage, editing and organization program. Jason Toff of Google's Mac team increased expectations with a recent blog post.

"At any given time, there will be plenty of Googlers at our booth available to answer questions about any Google software made for Mac or iPhone," Toff wrote. "Demo stations will be placed throughout the booth so that attendees can try out Google software on their own and, in many cases, talk to the people who helped create that software."

"I'd look at things such as a 32GB iPhone or a Picasa as things that are certainly probable," Gartenberg said.

Upgrades, more storage - how about an all-out fantasy iPhone? Some iPhone owners have been dreaming up their own ideas - the iPhone Pro or iPhone Elite, which would have 60GB of storage, a slide-out Qwerty keyboard, a one-megapixel camera for iChat and a high-quality camera with optical zoom and video.

Analysts say users' dreams of a souped-up iPhone is probably not on Apple's radar. "In terms of radical new form factors such as a keyboard-based iPhone, I'd say those would be least likely to happen," Gartenberg said.

One rumor that has many Mac users sitting up and paying attention is a new iMac.

Speculation has run rampant that a new iMac will hit the Macworld floor in January. The souped-up iMac would include a magnesium-aluminum alloy chassis, a cooling mechanism, and the low-power quad-core desktop chips coming from Intel.

"It's been a while since we've seen the iMac updated, so a new version of that wouldn't be a surprise," Gartenberg said.

Microsoft Outlines Pay-Per-Use PC Vision

Microsoft has applied for a patent on metered, pay-as-you-go computing.

U.S. patent application number 20080319910, published on Christmas Day, details Microsoft's vision of a situation where a "standard model" of PC is given away or heavily subsidized by someone in the supply chain. The end user then pays to use the computer, with charges based on both the length of usage time and the performance levels utilized, along with a "one-time charge."

Microsoft notes in the application that the end user could end up paying more for the computer, compared with the one-off cost entailed in the existing PC business model, but argues the user would benefit by having a PC with an extended "useful life."

"A computer with scalable performance level components and selectable software and service options has a user interface that allows individual performance levels to be selected," reads the patent application's abstract. The patent application was filed June 21, 2007.

"The scalable performance level components may include a processor, memory, graphics controller, etc. Software and services may include word processing, email, browsing, database access, etc. To support a pay-per-use business model, each selectable item may have a cost associated with it, allowing a user to pay for the services actually selected and that presumably correspond to the task or tasks being performed," the abstract continues.

Integral to Microsoft's vision is a security module, embedded in the PC, that would effectively lock the PC to a certain supplier.

"The metering agents and specific elements of the security module...allow an underwriter in the supply chain to confidently supply a computer at little or no upfront cost to a user or business, aware that their investment is protected and that the scalable performance capabilities generate revenue commensurate with actual performance level settings and usage," the application reads.

'A more granular approach' According to the application, the issue with the existing PC business model is that it "requires more or less a one chance at the consumer kind of mentality, where elasticity curves are based on the pressure to maximize profits on a one-time-sale, one-shot-at-the-consumer mentality."

Microsoft's proposed model, on the other hand, could "allow a more granular approach to hardware and software sales," the application states, adding that the user "may be able to select a level of performance related to processor, memory, graphics power, etc that is driven not by a lifetime maximum requirement but rather by the need of the moment."

"When the need is browsing, a low level of performance may be used and, when network-based interactive gaming is the need of the moment, the highest available performance may be made available to the user," the document reads. "Because the user only pays for the performance level of the moment, the user may see no reason to not acquire a device with a high degree of functionality, in terms of both hardware and software, and experiment with a usage level that suits different performance requirements."

By way of example, the application posits a situation involving three "bundles" of applications and performance: office, gaming, and browsing.

"The office bundle may include word-processing and spreadsheet applications, medium graphics performance and two of three processor cores," the document reads. "The gaming bundle may include no productivity applications but may include 3D graphics support and three of three processor cores. The browsing bundle may include no productivity applications, medium graphics performance and high-speed

network interface."

"Charging for the various bundles may be by bundle and by duration. For example, the office bundle may be \$1.00 [68 pence] per hour, the gaming bundle may be \$1.25 per hour and the browsing bundle may be \$0.80 per hour. The usage charges may be abstracted to 'units/hour' to make currency conversions simpler. Alternatively, a bundle may incur a one-time charge that is operable until changed or for a fixed-usage period," the document reads.

Microsoft's patent application does acknowledge that a per-use model of computing would probably increase the cost of ownership over the PC's lifetime. The company argues in its application, however, that "the payments can be deferred and the user can extend the useful life of the computer beyond that of the one-time purchase machine."

The document suggests that "both users and suppliers benefit from this new business model" because "the user is able to migrate the performance level of the computer as needs change over time, while the supplier can develop a revenue stream business that may actually have higher value than the one-time purchase model currently practiced."

"Rather than suffering through less-than-adequate performance for a significant portion of the life of a computer, a user can increase performance level over time, at a slight premium of payments," the application reads. "When the performance level finally reaches its maximum and still better performance is required, then the user may upgrade to a new computer, running at a relatively low performance level, probably with little or no change in the cost of use."

IE Lost Share to Firefox, Safari and Chrome in December

Web sites saw visitors deserting Microsoft's Internet Explorer browser in favor of Apple's Safari, Mozilla's Firefox and Google's Chrome in December, according to Web analytics company Net Applications.

Internet Explorer was used by 68.15 percent of Web surfers monitored in December, down from 69.77 percent in November and 71.27 percent in October, according to preliminary figures published by Net Applications on its Hitslink Web site Friday. IE's share has slipped from around 75 percent since the start of 2008.

Safari, Firefox and Chrome all profited from the slide in IE's popularity.

Firefox's share rose to 21.34 percent, from 20.78 percent in November and 19.97 percent in October, while Safari's climbed to 7.93 percent, from 7.13 percent in November and 6.57 percent in October.

Google's Chrome browser topped the 1 percent mark in Net Applications' survey for the first time, with a share of 1.04 percent, up from 0.83 percent in November and 0.74 percent in October.

Opera's share remained steady at 0.71 percent.

Net Applications warned that decreased workplace use of the Internet in December may have biased its results.

"The December holiday season strongly favored residential over business usage. This in turn increases the relative usage share of Mac, Firefox, Safari and other products that have relatively high residential usage," it said.

However, Internet Explorer's market share actually declined more slowly in December than it had done in November, according to the company's figures.

Operating system statistics provided by Net Applications suggest that Macintosh owners are more faithful to the browser provided by their operating system manufacturer than are Windows users. Mac OS market share increased slightly in December to 9.63 percent, from 8.87 percent in November, mirroring the rise in Safari usage. While desktop Linux usage by Web surfers remained steady at 0.85 percent, compared with 0.83 percent in November. Windows usage dipped to 88.68 percent from 89.62 percent in November, a smaller decline than that in IE usage.

Net Applications tracks browsers visiting sites that use its traffic monitoring service, compiling data on around 160 million visitors per month, according to its site.

Websites Could Get Cinema-Style Ratings

The kind of ratings used for films could be applied to websites in a bid to better police the Internet and protect children from harmful and offensive material, Britain's minister for culture has said.

Andy Burnham told The Daily Telegraph newspaper, published on Saturday, that the government was planning to negotiate with the administration of President-elect Barack Obama to draw up new international rules for English language websites.

"The more we seek international solutions to this stuff - the UK and the U.S. working together - the more that an international norm will set an industry norm," the newspaper reports the Culture Secretary as saying in an interview.

Giving websites film-style ratings would be one possibility.

"This is an area that is really now coming into full focus," Burnham told the paper.

Internet service providers could also be forced to offer services where the only sites accessible are those deemed suitable for children, the paper said.

Any moves to censor the Internet would go to the heart of a debate about freedom of speech on the World Wide Web.

"If you look back at the people who created the Internet they talked very deliberately about creating a space that governments couldn't reach," Burnham told The Telegraph. "I think we are having to revisit that stuff seriously now."

He said some content should not be available to be viewed.

"This is not a campaign against free speech, far from it; it is simply there is a wider public interest at stake when it involves harm to other people. We have got to get better at defining where the public interest lies and being clear about it."

Burnham, who has three young children, pointed to the example of a 9 p.m. television "watershed" in Britain before which certain material, like violence, cannot be broadcast, and said better controls were needed for the Internet.

The minister wants new industry-wide "take down times" so that websites like YouTube or Facebook would have to remove offensive or harmful content within a specified time once it is brought to their attention.

He also said Britain was considering changing libel laws to give people access to legal help if they are defamed online.

FCC Chair Okays Porn for Free Broadband

FCC Chairman Kevin Martin is reportedly dropping plans for free, national broadband service that would block access to porn. He told Ars Technica that he has circulated an order that would move forward on plans for a free wireless broadband network, but would strip provisions calling for a pornography filter.

"A lot of public interest advocates have said they would support this, but we're concerned about the filter," Martin said. The chairman has sent the plan - minus the porn filter - to his fellow commissioners, but they are apparently not too enthusiastic about the idea.

The commission in June proposed auctioning off spectrum in the AWS-3 band, which would be used for the nationwide broadband system. The winner was supposed to have built out the smut-free service within 10 years and pay a small percentage of its revenue to the U.S. Treasury.

Wireless carriers like T-Mobile, however, objected to the plan, claiming that activity in the AWS-3 band would interfere with wireless activity in the adjacent AWS-1 band - and specifically, its 3G network. T-Mobile paid \$4.2 billion for AWS-1 spectrum in 2006.

At the behest of T-Mobile, the commission conducted tests to ensure that a national broadband network would not interfere with mobile phones. The results, unveiled in October, concluded that mobile carriers have little to worry about.

Martin and the rest of the FCC's commissioners did not address the issue during a Tuesday meeting.

Facebook Nudity Policy Draws Nursing Moms' Ire

Web-savvy moms who breast-feed are irate that social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace restrict photos of nursing babies. The disputes reveal how the sites' community policing techniques sometimes

struggle to keep up with the booming number and diversity of their members.

Facebook began as a site just for college kids, but now it is an online home for 140 million people from all over the world. Among the new faces of Facebook are women like Kelli Roman, 23, who last year posted a photo of herself nursing one of her two children.

One day, she logged on to find the photo missing. When she pressed Facebook for an explanation, she got form e-mails in return.

Facebook bars people from uploading anything "obscene, pornographic or sexually explicit" - a policy that translates into a ban on pictures depicting certain amounts of exposed flesh.

Roman responded by starting a Facebook group called "Hey, Facebook, breastfeeding is not obscene!"

"There is nothing about bottle-feeding a child that has to be discreet," said Roman, who lives in Fallbrook, Calif., in an interview. "With breast-feeding, it should be the exact same way."

Today the group - part petition, part message board, part photo-sharing hub - has more than 97,600 members.

One of them, Stephanie Muir of Ottawa, was new to Facebook when she stumbled across the group last year. Muir, a mother of five, does volunteer work related to public health and breast-feeding and said the issue is important to her.

"I think it's time we all get over this notion that women's breasts are dangerous and harmful for children to see," she said. So she organized a Facebook protest last weekend against the site's policies, which she believes are arbitrarily enforced and discriminate against women.

Muir said more than 11,000 people participated in the group's "virtual nurse-in" by swapping out their regular profile pictures on Facebook and uploading ones depicting breast-feeding.

At Facebook's headquarters in Palo Alto, Calif., 23-year-old mom Heather Farley, who was visiting from her home in Provo, Utah, led a real-world nurse-in to complement the online event. About 10 women showed up to breast-feed their babies outside the front door, drawing attention from local media if not Facebook employees, who were scarce on that Saturday after Christmas.

A member for almost four years, Farley has nearly 400 friends on Facebook, a network she'd be hard-pressed to replicate if she moved to a smaller site with more lenient photo policies. She uses Facebook more than e-mail to stay in touch with far-flung high school and college friends. She especially likes to check out pictures of their babies and share photos of hers. But with a 9-month-old, "it's almost hard to get a picture of me not nursing," she said.

This fall, Farley changed her profile photo to one that showed her breast-feeding. Someone probably objected, because Facebook deleted it. It, like MySpace, generally relies on members to point out when others break the rules.

Facebook spokesman Barry Schnitt said the company's guidelines regarding

exposed flesh allow most breast-feeding photos. However, Facebook draws the line at a visible nipple or areola, he said. Facebook also nixes pictures showing the gluteal cleft.

Facebook doesn't generally go looking for nudity, but it does respond quickly when someone on the site flags another person's photo as inappropriate. Schnitt said the policies were instituted years ago, when Facebook was much smaller, but they reflect common practices on mainstream Web sites.

"We decided nudity was something we didn't want on the site. It doesn't matter the context. We would agree that there are absolutely many contexts for nudity where it is not obscene," Schnitt said, but emphasized that Facebook can't practically convene a panel to decide on a case-by-case basis.

John Palfrey, a Harvard Law School professor who specializes in Internet issues, called Facebook a victim of its own success.

"As we wrap more and more of our lives into a single environment on the Web, the feeling that civil liberties ought to be protected there continues to grow," Palfrey said.

But it's really just that - a feeling. Online hangouts might simulate a public place, but they're still private Web sites where the company is king, not the Constitution or the myriad state laws that apply to breast-feeding outside the home.

News Corp.-owned MySpace, which prohibits nudity, also has sparked online protests over photos taken down of breast-feeding mothers. A company spokeswoman did not return messages seeking comment.

One contrast is LiveJournal, a popular blogging network, which made an exception for nursing in its no-nudity policy. The rule came in response to feedback from users and an advisory board comprised of Internet scholars.

While Schnitt said Facebook's policies predate a recent push by law enforcement agencies to better protect children from online predators, the whole field of Web hangouts may be skittish about anything that might expose kids to nudity, said Lee Tien, a senior staff attorney at the free-speech watchdog group Electronic Frontier Foundation.

Facebook already curtails the activities of some members based on age and the networks they belong to. For example, adults can't look at profiles of kids under the age of 18, even if they're members of the same regional network.

Palfrey suggests a middle ground might emerge, in which networking sites like Facebook can better satisfy diverse constituencies without creating strife. That will require honing the technology to make it more certain that only people within specific networks and groups could see, say, a breast-feeding photo, while keeping children from seeing nudity.

Palfrey describes the goal as making "a site that is good for everyone, or good for the largest number of people, rather than the fewest."

Mark January 15 in your calendar: Rumors of layoffs at Microsoft peg that as the day the bad news will come.

The latest to report on the possibility of layoffs at the software giant is the blog Fudzilla, which puts the number of job cuts at 15,000, or nearly 17 percent of Microsoft's worldwide operations. The January 15 date is a week before Microsoft's second-quarter earnings report, scheduled for January 22.

Microsoft also has a briefing for financial analysts planned for January 8 at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, with the headliner listed as Robbie Bach, president of the entertainment and devices division.

Those purported layoff numbers are up from earlier rumors, which suggested that 10 percent of the company's employees would lose their jobs.

Fudzilla sees the biggest hit coming for the MSN unit, where Yusuf Mehdi recently took over as marketing chief while the company continued to look for an executive to run its overall online services group:

So far, we haven't managed to confirm what departments or regions will be hit the worst, but we're hearing that MSN might be carrying the brunt of the layoffs. We're also hearing rumors about the possibility of somewhat larger staff cuts at Microsoft EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa).

It's unlikely that Microsoft will be laying off a lot of people in departments and regions that are doing well, and considering the recent upturn in console sales, we have a feeling that at least most of the people working in the Xbox 360 departments will be pretty safe.

Wall Street veteran Henry Blodget says the target areas mentioned by Fudzilla make sense, but not the high volume of job cuts:

Unless Microsoft's business has been absolutely crushed in the past two months, there is no reason for the company to suddenly cut this much cost. Microsoft's margins are still fine, and much of its revenue is generated from multi-year contracts (and is therefore unlikely to see a massive intra-quarter hit).

In October, word leaked out of Microsoft that it would be closing its MSN Groups service on February 21, to be replaced with Windows Live Groups.

Blodget sees potential for a restructuring in Redmond that would fit into the long-running, on-again-off-again Microhoo saga:

The only way we could see Microsoft laying off this many people is if the company decided to eliminate business units. And if Microsoft did decide to restructure its business, it would likely sell rather than shut down divisions, including MSN (If Microsoft wants to get out of the consumer Internet business, which it should, the best way to do it is to spin its online operations into Yahoo in exchange for a big piece of the company.)

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